




Pericles

Policy recommendation and improved communication tools for law enforcement and security agencies preventing violent radicalization

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The Family Information Portal

With Guidelines for LEAs Dealing with Families Affected by Radicalisation

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Result Report



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The Family Information Portal

With Guidelines for LEAs Dealing with Families Affected by Radicalisation

Abstract: The Family Information Portal provides free, accessible and comprehensive information for families who are affected by radicalisation; whether they simply have some concerns or whether radicalisation is confirmed as the cause of the problems within the family. It deals with an entire spectrum of scenarios, from a family who is looking for basic information about whether a member might be radicalising, all the way through to a situation in which a family member is missing or killed in a foreign conflict zone.

The Family Information Portal is intended for families affected by Islamist, Separatist, extreme Right-Wing and extreme Left-Wing terrorism.

Alongside the information for families, we have also developed Guidelines for Law Enforcement Agencies who may be confronted with families who have been affected by radicalisation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Radicalisation that leads to terrorism is one of the phenomena that has dominated both national and international agendas in the recent decades; it also has its disturbing impact on families and societies. Our interviews with several families, who were dealing with the process of radicalisation of a family member, confirms this. The devastating effects of radicalisation within families are enormous.

There are several reasons why radicalisation occurs. Sageman (2004) argues that social bonds (friendship, kinship and discipleship) have forced many individuals to radicalise and to participate in terrorist activities. Similarly, Bakker (2006) after analysing 242 individuals concludes that there are many socio-economic factors like unemployment, injustice, kinship and criminal activity behind radicalisation and terrorist activities. Bloom (2005), Ganor (2009), Hundley (2011) and Walker (2007) discuss the same motives but from different perspectives. Finally, Arian (2012) former Deputy Director of the Department of Human Rights at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Afghanistan admits that the process of radicalisation which finally leads to terrorism is a highly complex phenomenon in terms of its concept and motivations. He adds that despite scholarly efforts to address the root causes of radicalisation and terrorism there are still significant uncertainties. There are also several reasons why some families fail to deal with the process of radicalisation of one of their members. Lack of knowledge around the topic, taboo, inability to recognise its signs and unawareness where to ask for help are some reasons why families fail to prevent radicalisation.

In order to enable families to recognise the signs of radicalisation in its early stages and to deal with the process of radicalisation of their members, we decided to create an online *Family Information Portal*. This Portal covers Islamist, Separatist and Right and Left-Wing radicalisation. It provides information for families on the whole of the radicalisation process, from why people radicalise in the first place right the way through to advice on how to deal with a situation in which a family member has travelled to a foreign conflict zone. It also provides guidelines for families on which organisations can help them and guidelines for Law Enforcement

Agencies (LEAs) on how to deal with families who might approach them with concerns about radicalisation.

2 LESSONS FROM INTERVIEWS

We carried out interviews with families who were dealing with the issue of radicalisation across Europe. Based on the experience of these families, we found a lot of similarities regarding questions about how to deal with radicalisation. The questions they pose and the complaints they had were comparable too. These similarities are as following:

- Families were not expecting any of their members to radicalise.
- They failed to recognise signs of radicalisation.
- Had no or little knowledge around the topic.
- Did not know how to deal or interact with the member who was radicalising.
- Did not know whom to ask for help.
- Dealt with the issue of radicalisation as a taboo.

In addition, the interviews also indicated that the interaction between families and LEAs were not very positive. To sum up their experience:

- LEAs were not very familiar with the problem of radicalisation.
- They did not know how to deal with a radicalised person.
- They did not know how to deal with the family of the radicalised person.
- They were inclined towards treating families as suspects.
- They were not open and transparent.
- They did not share any information.
- They used the families as source of information without offering them any support or information in return.

3 METHODOLOGY

Alongside the qualitative interviews which we undertook with families, was also designed a quantitative component to the research.

We designed a needs assessment for families and Law Enforcement Agencies. We defined the LEAs whom we should primarily be targeting as: community police officers, experts within the police agencies, for example investigators tasked with carrying out interviews of suspects in radicalisation cases, and those tasked with investigating internet activity, such as officers from OSINT, the open source intelligence agency, intelligence agencies, prison services.

Questionnaires for LEAs were designed in close collaboration with the LEAs who are included in the consortium of the Pericles project. They include direct questions designed to cover two main goals: capturing the experiences of LEA personnel which will be helpful in providing new insights into processes of radicalisation, and an inventory of both the current gaps in provision of materials for LEA personnel and their perception of their current needs. It included questions about the experiences of the personnel in encountering radicalisation in their work field, questions on the nature of the work and the current materials available to them to do it, and questions on the experiences of LEA personnel in preventing and countering radicalisation. There were 3 general sections common to all LEA respondents, covering demographics, general information about employment and observations about the background and history of people whom they have come into professional contact with who have radicalised and a specific section for the different target groups of the law enforcement professionals. This was disseminated as an online survey within police departments of the participating countries and overarching organisations such as RANPOL, the police branch of the European Radicalisation Awareness Network. We reached 500 LEA personnel via the online survey. The questionnaires were translated into Spanish, Dutch, Greek and German.

Questionnaires for family members were formulated as a semi structured interview, allowing a flexible approach to fully accommodate this potentially vulnerable target group. They were designed to capture some biographical aspects of the family member who has radicalised, an

account of any contact that the family has had with LEAs and to identify both the positive and negative aspects of this contact.

Questionnaires for former radicals and those convicted of terrorism related offences were designed to be applied as a semi structured interview. They covered biographical aspects both of the life of the interviewee and specific details of the radicalisation process.

It is crucial to identify both static and dynamic risk factors in a needs assessment of those at risk of, and indeed those previously demonstrating tendencies towards, radicalisation (Roberts & Horgan, 2008). Static risk factors, such as nationality and ethnicity, childhood abuse experiences, or childhood family experiences, do not change over time. Dynamic risk factors, such as drug use, friendships and associations, emotions and perceptions favourable to radicalisation, are subject to change and are, to some degree, under the control of the individual. Roberts and Horgan (2008) argue that robust empirically tested needs assessment tools are urgently needed. There have of course been important improvements in the development of needs and risk assessment tools in recent years, not least of which is VERA (Beardsley & Beach, 2013), however there are tried and tested risk assessment methodologies used for conventional crime that may have much to offer. Criminological research has a strong tradition of undertaking longitudinal studies with high risk groups, and two such studies in particular warrant a brief mention. First, the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development followed 400 males in London from age 8 to 48 (Farrington et al, 2012). Beginning in 1961, participants underwent tests administered in schools by psychologists to assess intelligence, attainment, personality and impulsivity. Detailed qualitative interviews were carried out with participants throughout the duration of the study, and parents were interviewed once per year until participants were of school leaving age. Farrington and colleagues (2012:48) summarise the dominant themes from their research as follows:

The most important factors that should be targeted in intervention research are impulsiveness, school achievement, child-rearing methods, young mothers, child abuse, parental conflict, disrupted families, poverty, delinquent peers, and deprived neighbourhoods.

Remarking specifically on violent offenders, Farrington (2012) states that large family size, harsh parental discipline, physical abuse by a violent parent, and poor parental supervision

are important risk factors that should be identified in a needs or risk assessment. Similar findings were reported by the Pittsburgh Youth Study which followed 1500 young males for 12 years in Pittsburgh (Farrington et al, 2012). Both studies emphasised that far less is known about protective and promotive factors than risk factors, and needs assessments should be designed that aim to identify protective and promotive factors in participants lives. The Cambridge and Pittsburgh studies represent very impressive prospective longitudinal studies that have produced a plethora of books and articles, and effectively established developmental criminology as a sub discipline. In both studies, in-depth qualitative interviews were essential for accessing the rich data that enabled such substantial findings to emerge.

Questionnaires have been disseminated by our consortium members throughout the participating countries, the UK, the Netherlands, Spain, Greece, France, and Ireland.

4 THE DESIGN OF THE FAMILY INFORMATION PORTAL

The objective of this tool is to alert families to the possibility of radicalisation, raise their awareness about their own potential role in combating it, and give them some very practical tips on doing so. It contains:

- General information about radicalisation including the role that families can play in countering it.
- A list of indicators which may suggest that someone is radicalising
- Tips on how to contact and remain in dialogue with a family member about whom there are some concerns
- Suggestions of the professional organisations including the police and other LEA's who might be able to be of help.
- Relevant information about them, gathered from the needs assessment

The Family Information Portal also supports families whose family member is preparing for travel to a foreign conflict zone, is in a foreign conflict zone, or who is preparing

to return from one. The focus is upon supporting and promoting ongoing contact between families and these members. Its main objective is to enhance optimal contact between families in this situation and LEAs in order to, where possible, prevent European citizen from travelling to foreign combat zones, and in the eventuality that they have already travelled, where possible to prevent them taking part in combat, monitor their actions and persuade them to return home and facilitate the return of combatants or their wives and children in the safest way. These are of course sensitive areas – not least because the law on foreign combatants differs so widely between European countries. However, the needs of families in this situation are the same throughout Europe: ensuring that their loved ones are safe, and where necessary facilitating their return and reintegration. It contains:

- Tips for preventing foreign travel
- Tips for remaining in contact with family members, even if they have already left
- Information regarding the role of the authorities and any other relevant legal information
- List of authorities and other European organisations who can provide one to one care and advice
- Tips on self-care.

The Family Information Portal also provides practical tips for LEAs dealing either with families who have contacted them requesting for their help with a family member who is or maybe radicalising, or dealing with the families of those who are already known to law enforcement agencies in this context. The emphasis is upon working towards a mutually supportive relationship.

It includes:

- Information on the potential benefits of fostering positive relations with families
- Information on what families need at each stage of this process
- Do's and don'ts in dealing with families

5 ROLE OF FAMILIES

The issue of radicalisation is not limited to the person who is radicalising. Its side-effects reach families, societies and institutions on local, national and international levels. Hence, it is important to deal with the issue of radicalisation on various levels. Families are a vital starting point: in order to be able to deal with the problem of radicalisation one has to equip families with knowledge and expertise around the topic. There is affection and confidence between family members, especially between parents and children. Parents interact with their children regularly, observe changes rapidly and are often the first actors in identifying signs of possible radicalisation to extremism. This was also the case with the families whose children were radicalising. Families did observe changes but failed to recognise the signs of radicalisation for they were unfamiliar with the subject. Equipping families with knowledge and expertise is the first step to fight radicalisation effectively, because of the crucial preventative role which families are able to play.

The importance of families is also stressed by Global Counterterrorism Forum (2015). This research indicates that families play a vital role in shaping individual perspective on non-violence. Furthermore, it recommends the empowerment of mothers as they can play a significant role in prevention. This research also stresses the importance of education and awareness programs for families in order to prevent further radicalisation. Confirming this, Sikkens, van San, Sieckelink, and de Winter (2017) suggest that parents undoubtedly play a crucial role in the de-radicalisation process of their children unless they are deprived of necessary knowledge and expertise around the topic. Bartlett and Birdwell (2010) also affirms the importance of parents in fighting radicalisation. He adds that it is important for parents to listen to their children and their extreme ideas. This interaction has to be based on knowledge and awareness, otherwise children will search for extreme alternatives. Likewise, a huge amount of literature stressing the role of parents in the de-radicalisation process of their children can be found.

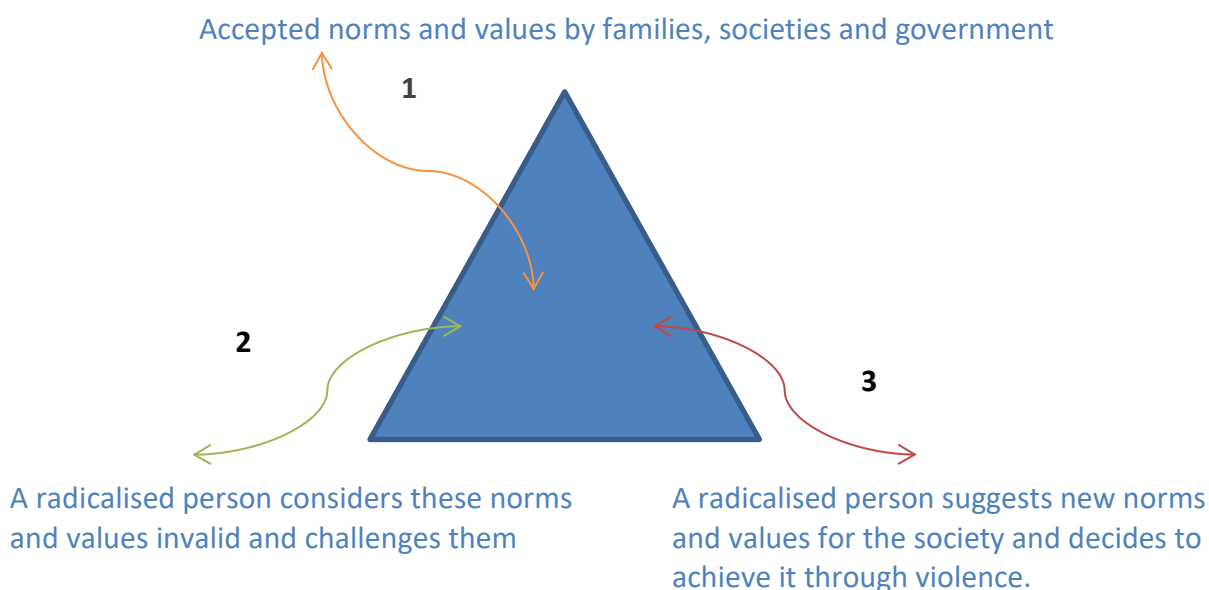
Experiences, researches and recommendations suggest that families can play a significant role both in prevention of radicalisation and de-radicalisation processes of their members. They

can also make re-integration and rehabilitation programs successful. Hence, it is important to assist families by providing them with an online Family Information Portal.

The Portal needs to make the following materials available for families:

a. What is radicalisation?

There is no consensus on the definition of the term radicalisation. It is defined in various ways. For the Portal, it is important to present an understandable definition of the term. The Portal aims to make families familiar with the term radicalisation and to raise awareness around it. The following definition of the term radicalisation is simple, understandable and conveyable. Radicalisation is a process when a person's thinking and behaviour becomes significantly different from the rest of the society. A person who radicalises seeks to change his or her family, the society and the government. When this person decides to justify the act of violence in order to achieve his or her goal then it is called violent extremism. Based on this definition radicalisation can be seen as:



Once an individual decides to oppose to accepted norms and values established by the society, then he also changes his or her attitude and behaviour. These changes are called signs of radicalisation. Based on the interviews we have carried out with the families of the radicalised individuals, parents mentioned the following signs.

b. What are the signs of radicalisation?

If a sign or some signs of radicalisation are observed in an individual's behaviour then it does not necessarily mean he or she is radicalised. But it is also important to realise, when a combination of different signs is observed then it is risky to conclude that an individual is not radicalised. Plainly, when a blend of different signs of radicalisation is visible in an individual's behaviour then it is wise to be alert.

These signs are:

- Change in appearance
- Isolating themselves from family, friends and society
- Leaving old friends and making new ones
- Becoming intolerant towards others
- Disrespectful attitude towards others
- Criticizing parents and families
- Intolerance
- Becoming increasingly aggressive
- Changing online identity and using more than one identity
- No longer doing things they used to enjoy
- Sympathetic to extremist ideologies and groups
- Joining or trying to join an extremist group
- Us versus them thinking
- Unwilling to talk about their views and ideas
- Glorifying violence
- Glorifying killing of innocents
- Embracing conspiracy theories
- Refusing to listen to different point of views

c. How to deal with a child who is radicalising or radicalised?

Once families are educated about the radicalisation process and enabled to recognise its signs. The next important step is to empower families to deal with it and handle it.

These are some of the instructions advised by different sources:

- Try to find out what keeps your child busy
- Know your child's friend and gain information about your child's friend

- Keep lines of communication open, listen to your child and talk to them about their interests
- Encourage them to participate in positive activities with local groups you trust
- Allow and encourage discussion on different topics
- Avoid confrontational discussions
- Be aware of your child's online activity and update your own knowledge
- Provide alternatives, for example: it is not necessary to travel to conflict areas in order to help poor and needy people. It is also possible to help them by joining a local NGO
- Contact the school
- Help your children to be critically aware of what they see on TV and internet
- Involve organisations which have experience and expertise on this field
- Ask for help from authorities.

6 ROLE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

Part of the Family Information Portal is a section for Law Enforcement Agency employees who, during the course of their work, come into contact with families who have been affected by radicalisation. It is intended to provide guidelines about how to manage that contact. It is intended to highlight the needs of the families, but doesn't go into detail on the legal situation in specific countries.

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